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FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
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INFO AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000154

STATE FOR AF/E AND AF/RSA; STATE PASS USAID FOR OFDA;
NAIROBI FOR GEORGIANNA PLATT

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [ER](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES APPEALS FOR ASSISTANCE

Classified By: AMB. RONALD K. MCMULLEN FOR REASON 1.4(D)

11. (C) Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Country Director Jim McLaughlin told the ambassador that CRS will close down in June if it is unable to secure USG funding of at least \$750,000 to \$800,000. McLaughlin had just returned from consultations with CRS headquarters in Baltimore where this decision had been made. He said with CRS's budget down 26 percent worldwide, the NGO needed to cut programming. CRS/Eritrea currently has small community-based water and sanitation projects in two provinces. McLaughlin has been unable to travel to the projects, but monitors them through his Eritrean staff who are able to visit them and take photographs. He said he has a good working relationship with the Ministry of Land, Water, and Environment, even though his staff have been harassed and his warehouse temporarily sealed. CRS is also supporting humanitarian projects that the Church is implementing. He said thousands of people are coming to the churches for food assistance.

12. (C) Embassy Asmara supports the continued funding of CRS/Eritrea. CRS's water and sanitation projects, although small in scope, are a positive contribution to Eritrea's development, given that only 1 in 12 Eritreans has access to a toilet or latrine. The policy reasons for continued support are even more compelling. CRS is the sole remaining American NGO. Without a USAID mission at post, the American people have no other representation in the development community here and have no positive face to show to the Eritrea people that would counter GSE anti-American propaganda. Should the Isaias government come to an end, the U.S. would have no other organization to resume assistance quickly. The Catholic Church is the only denomination that has been able to remain independent of the Eritrean government. As such it a source of hope to the thousands who are persecuted because of their faith. CRS's moral support is critical to the Church's continued autonomy.

MCMULLEN